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HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE CHAPLAINCY(to XIX century)

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## THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE CHAPLAINCY(to XIX Cent)

Statement of Purpose  
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Much has been written about the history of the chaplaincy. Therefore this humble work may seem superfluous. But my purpose is to trace through the ages the "possible" predecessors and the actual beginnings of the chaplains.

The reader may at times smile at the seemingly far-fetched conclusions drawn from historical facts; but he should bear in mind that other times have other customs and thus I feel justified in my deductions.

### III

#### INTRODUCTION

Divine Providence never abandons man, but to each one in his particular state of life, grants the means to attain eternal life.

In the course of history of mankind we find nations fighting other nations and thus relying upon national armies. The men in these armies need spiritual help and guidance and this requires specialized ministers of God whom we call now chaplains.

It is necessary here to point out the evolution of this specialized service, which we call the chaplaincy. At one time these men of God (or gods) were maybe only asked to consult their gods before an important battle; at other times they may have taken an active part in the campaigns, but all were there for a religious purpose.

In our concise and very imperfect and incomplete work we could not describe everything about this historical evolution of the work of these men of God, being limited in our research by the limitations of the Chaplain School itself and its research facilities.

We will then try in these few pages to describe the principal, historical and characteristic facts of these men of God, as we found them in the sources as indicated.

A brief notice about the etymological and historical origin of the name "chaplain" will precede the historical part proper.

## IV

### WHAT IS IN A NAME?

#### ETYMOLOGY

Chaplain:ME.chapeleyn-chapaleyn,earlier capeleyn, later A.S.capellene after M.L.)O.F.:chapelain:PR.capelan:Sp.cape-  
lan:G.capellan:It.capellano:D.kapelaan:Dan.Sw.kapellan:  
ML.capellanus.

The name is thus used in the earliest English writers,  
f.i.Torkington in "Diaries of English Travel(p.35):

"Ther by Also ys a parte of a stone upon the whych  
Seynt John Evangeliste sayd often Masse be fore that blys-  
syd lady as her chapleyn aftyr the assension of ower lorde"

In Chaucer, Gen.Prob.to C.T. it is meant the private  
secretary to the lady superior of a convent.:

"Another nonne with hire hadde she that was hire chape-  
leyn." <sup>1</sup>

As we see the name was not always used as we know it  
today.

#### HISTORY

The origin of capella has been a fruitful source of  
controversy.The opinion most favored is that which DuCange  
has drawn from earlier writers,viz.that the word derived  
from the capa or capella of St Martin of Tours(397).This  
was a short cloakpreserved as arelic by the Kings of France.  
They carried it with them when they went to war and on the  
field enshrined it under a tent.This tent gradually recei-  
ved the name capella and the custodian of the relic were  
thence called capellani.

Others think that the word capella simply signifies  
a covering,and that the name arose from the tent-like struc-  
ture erected by the Kings of France to canopy the altar for  
the soldiers in the field.<sup>2</sup>

## CHAPTER I : ANCIENT TIMES

In studying ancient history we find continually instances where the ancient peoples: Assyrians, Hebrews, Greeks, Romans etc. never did anything important without consulting their God or gods. This consultation may be for strictly religious purposes, for social occasions, but especially before engaging the enemy they asked the divine blessings and invoked the help of their gods. After the battle they frequently offered victims as thanksgiving for a battle won.

The priest of Amon-Re (2700-2200 B.C.) during the fifth Egyptian dynasty, accompanied the armies in war.<sup>3</sup>

The French historian Rene Sedillot describes certain rites performed by the ancestors of the people of Perigord living 3000 years ago. As he states this was always done in connection with hunting or waging war.<sup>4</sup> The presence in France, Belgium and England of the immense sacrificial tables (20 meter high, weighing 300 ton) called Dolmen and Men-Hirs, again point to sacrifices performed to invoke, thank or please the gods of war. (In France alone there are about 4500 dolmen and 6200 men-hirs left)

The priests of the Celts, ancestors of the French, named druids, were at the same time sorcerers, physicians, astronomers and judges; they ordered sacrifices to thank the gods for victory.<sup>5</sup>

By far the greatest source of religious men following the armies and performing their sacred functions we find in the Bible. It will be sufficient to quote a few passages while indicating some others:

"And now all the army chieftains, Johonnan, son of Caræe and Jezonias and their followers high and low, came to consult Jeremias."<sup>6</sup>

"But Josaphath would Achabconsult the Lord first. So Achab sent for his prophets, some four hundred in number and asked wether he should attack Ramoth-Galaad or let it be? Go to the attack, they said; the Lord means to make the king's grace master of it".<sup>7</sup>

"And when the next day dawned, Josue was astir, and the priests took up the ark, seven of them carrying the seven jubilee trumpets and blowing them before the ark as they went with the fighting men in the van and the rest of the people behind, marching to the noise of trumpets".<sup>8</sup>

Other references to the service of men of God in the Bible, in relation with their armies:

I Kings 4:3  
12:9-11  
II Kings 5:23-25  
III Kings 12: 9-11  
20: 13  
22: 5  
Josue 6:4-5  
Judges 18:5  
20:28  
Numbers 27:21  
I Macc. 3:44  
II Macc. 15:25-27

In passing we should mention the influence of the oracles. These were the responses believed to be given by a deity to a worshipper or inquirer. In Egypt, but especially in Greece they were numerous. Best known from schooldays is the oracle of Delphi in Phocis. This was the chief national oracle of the whole Hellenic race. Its ambiguous responses are famous like the answer given to an armyman inquiring about his chances of survival: "Ibis Peribis Numquam Redibis".<sup>9</sup> It gives a different meaning depending on the place of the comma. Herodotus mentions the oracle of Delphi in his history and also Deiphanus, the soothsayer to the Greek armament.

## CHAPTER II: ROMAN EMPIRE TO EARLY MIDDLE AGES

When finally Christianity reached Gaul through merchants and priests, may we not assume that these men accompanied the Roman legions? How otherwise to explain the numerous examples in the lives of the Saints of the military officers and men who shed their blood for Christ. Best known among them was St. Sebastian (288) and the heroic martyrdom of the Thebeian legion. Certainly they were encouraged to stand fast in their faith by men of God.

Not only Christianity was propagated in the Roman Armies, because we read: "Despite the persecutions of the Antonines, Severus, Maximin and Decius, the Christian Church grew in numbers and power. Its chief competitor was the cult of the Persian Mithras, a god popular with and widely spread by the troops." <sup>10</sup>

After the great persecutions, when peace was restored bishops and priests tended to their flock in the camps of the Roman Empire, beginning with Constantine the great (288). Tertullian wrote: "We remember that we owe thanks to God... We dwell in this world with you; with you again we sail the seas; with you we serve as soldiers...." <sup>11</sup>

Sozomenus writes in his "Historia Ecclesiastica" that to help the soldiers spiritually, their weapons were blessed with the sign of the Cross and in the palace a chapel was built. Each time the soldiers went to war, a tabernacle like a small church was built to take with them. In it the soldiers praised God, prayed and received the sacraments." <sup>12</sup> The priests and deacons served wherever they went, performing the religious services, according to the rites of the Church.

The records during the period of the Roman occupation



in England, do not throw much light on the subject, but thereafter there are constant references to this alliance between the ecclesiastics and the army. As early as 430, a certain Bishop, Germanus, leads the army in a battle in Wales against the Saxons and the Picts, and is instrumental in the victory of what is called the "Halleluja" battle. The historian Bede makes reference to the leading part of the clergy in certain other battles in Wales, Chester, York, Scotland and elsewhere.

A Church document which proves the continuation of the organized Chaplaincy since Constantine up to the 6th century is part of a letter written by Pope Pelagius I (556-561) to Bishop Laurentius of Civitavecchia, as we find it in the "Decretum Gratianum." There he states that the priests need a letter from Emperor Justinian I (527-565) to serve with the soldiers. The pope tells the bishop to examine carefully if these priests are worthy and well prepared for this service. He inquires if they live according to the sacred canons of the Church. Benareggi states that this is the oldest document treating explicitly of chaplains. Saegmuller deduces from this text the existence of a well organized Military Vicariate under which local clergy, serving with the Armed Forces were dependent from the bishop in war and peace.

The continuation and progress of the organized chaplaincy in the 7th and 8th centuries, is obvious from the German National Council of 734, during the reign of St Boniface, the Consilium Leptinense of 743 and the Capitulary of Charlemagne, 21 April 742. Each one of these councils considers such matters pertaining to the Chaplaincy as: ecclesiastical discipline and the qualities required in Army Chaplains. At that time the priests chaplains received already the

faculties to say Mass in open air and with portable altar.

Let us return now to the Franco-Germans. At this time Charlemagne is reigning (771-814). He had a very close understanding with the papacy and supported the Church reform, which settled the foundation of mediaeval Christian unity. It is unthinkable that Charlemagne would not have had some clergymen with his conquering forces. As basis of my belief I only cite the fact that f.i. in 785 he conquered Saxony after a costly and bitter struggle of thirty years, and introduced forcibly Christianity despite stubborn pagan resistance. It was then that the Bishopric of Bremen was founded (821).

In the following century we find another instance that would indicate the presence of priests in the army of Henry I (919-936): The occupation by Henry of the land between the Schlei and the Eider (Charlemagne's Dane Mark). The Danish king was made tributary and forced to receive Christian missionaries.

Later under Otto I (936-973) we see that as a result of the Battle of Lechfeld he established Bishoprics among the Slavs, under the Archbishopric of Magdeburg (968).

All this seems to indicate, without absolute certainty, but with great probability, the presence of clergymen in the armies of this period.

The purpose of the Crusades itself is enough evidence of the presence of priests in their armies. The Crusades were expeditions undertaken, in fulfilment of a solemn vow to deliver the Holy Places from Mohammedan tyranny. The honor of initiating the crusade has been attributed to Peter the Hermit, a recluse of Picardy, who, after a pilgrimage of Jerusalem and a vision in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, went to pope Urban II and was commissioned by him to preach the crusade. Bands, organized or not, sprang up on all sides

amid wonderful enthusiasm and cries of "God wills it". Most Christian nations participated. One of the bands, headed by Folkmar, a German cleric, was slaughtered by the Hungarians. Peter the Hermit himself led the Army composed of French, Flemings, Italian, German, Scotch and Englishmen.

On Easter 1146, St Bernard of Clairvaux's preaching re-kindled the sacred flame and launched Christendom upon the second stage of its battle for the Holy Sepulchre. "On the 27th of December 1147 he obtained the consent of Conrad III to lead the German Corps and solemnly delivered to him the blessed standard."

At That time a new institution was founded to provide spiritual aid to the Armed Forces. The Knights of the Temple, or Templars, founded (1120) by Hugh of Pajens to guide and protect the pilgrims; they were confirmed by the Synod of Troyes (1128) and by Pope Honorius III. Bernard of Clairvaux drew up their rule, a modification of the Cistercian. This new spiritual militia was the most perfect and most active element in society, for it achieved a union of the sacred and the profane; it proved extraordinarily effective.

### CHAPTER III:MIDDLE AGES TO RENAISSANCE

A few words here about the origin of the "Chaplain of the King". In the East, the emperor followed the example of Constantine the Great and instituted chapels in the Imperial palaces. The chaplain was called: Cartophylax or Protopapa. In the West the chaplain of the Palace was called Abbot, Archchaplain, protochaplain, Master of the Royal Chapel and finally Major Chaplain.

How was this chaplain connected with the military? The religious service in the royal palace was the duty of three distinct clergymen: the Chaplain of the King, the Chaplain of the Palace and the Chaplain of the soldiers. The great power of the Chaplain of the King finally achieved the union of these three functions.

The historical document of this period is the "Constitution of Innocentius III (1198-1216) treating about the chaplains of the King, who serve the soldiers and who live with them. The Chaplaincy does not seem to be organized anymore as in the 6th century, and, under the influence of the political structure, the chaplain administers to the soldiers of dukes, Military Orders etc. It is in fact no longer a national organization, but regional and feudal.

The connection between clergy and army is found again when we come to the days of William the Conqueror (1028-1078). Many of the clergy were leading statesmen of the realm, and some of its most important landlords. As such they were compelled to raise forces for the king. There was a tradition in some dioceses that the bishop should train and lead his own men. It is probably true to say that up to 1300, no war was embarked upon, no army raised in England, which had not on its strength and among its leaders, many of the foremost ecclesiastics.

of the land. When we come to the period of Edward I (1239-1307) we come to the end of the fighting clerics and the appearance on the payroll of the Army chaplain. About this time they were divided into two sections: the higher class attached to the feudal lord is described as the *Capellanus magnificus*. These received the princely sum of one shilling a day while performing their services. The second class is called the *Capellanus vulgaris*, who received sixpence a day. The first record of the actual employment of such chaplains is contained in records of the year 1299-1300 and printed in a volume published by the Society of Antiquaries in London.

From the most heroic pages of the history of Flanders, which set our hearts on flame as youths, I remember vividly that the Flemish burghers on the morning of 11 July 1302, knelt and received H. Communion from their priests. That same day was fought the "Battle of the Golden Spurs" where little democratic Flanders beat mighty noble France. Well known among these chaplains was Willem Van Saeftinge, who also took active part in the battle.

Reference is made to the chaplains in the account of second expeditionary force under Henry V (1387-1422) of England. One account of the battle of Agincourt (1414) is written by a chaplain, Thomas Eltham, who accompanied the force. He mentions two classes of chaplains; one belonging to the king's retinue, which now numbered thirty-two, and another class attached to the nobles.

While we know that the British had their chaplains with them from the above accounts, we can say the same about the French of the same period. Joan of Arc (1429) f. i. was given in Tours a household of her own, such as a commissioned leader of the army was entitled to. Among these was a monk of the Order of St Augustine: Jean Pasquerel. Most certainly there

were other chaplains in the retinue of the other leaders.

The establishment of chaplains became more fixed as the history of the country developed. By the time of Henry VIII (1491-1547) there was a definite establishment of chaplains in the army. Twelve were attached to the King's retinue; five to that of a duke; four to that of a marquis; three to that of an earl and one to that of a knight. The pay still remains at one shilling a day.

For the first time we cross the wide ocean and follow the Spanish Conquistadores in their search for riches, but always accompanied by the monks, mostly Franciscans, who brought the good tidings to the pagan Indians, while ministering to the soldiers. One of the many: Fray Marcos de Niza, Franciscan friar, born in Nice 1495, went to America in 1531. In his report: "Descubimiento las siete ciudades"<sup>13</sup> which led Coronado to make his expedition next year to Zuni, of which Fray Marcos was the guide.

The outstanding event of the 16th century in regard to Christianity may well be the battle of Lepanto of 7 October 1571. It was the culminating event in the long naval duel between the Spaniards and the Turks. Don Juan of Austria, with the aid of a papal and Venetian fleet, inflicted a tremendous defeat on the Turks and thus preserved Christianity. During this battle the soldiers were led in prayer, especially the Rosary, by their priests.

#### CHAPTER IV: RENAISSANCE TO XIX CENTURY

In France around 1514 there was a "Grand Aumônier du Roi"<sup>14</sup> who then took the name of "Grand Aumônier de France"<sup>15</sup> which finally became the "Aumônerie Militaire"<sup>16</sup> because all the chaplains were subjected to it. The papal bull of Clement VI, 20 April 1531, contains the privileges granted. The organization of the Chaplaincy was given to the Capuchin and Franciscan monks. During the time of Cardinal de Richelieu the Jesuits became active as military chaplains. At that time military chaplains took also care of the wounded and the sick.

In England, from the time of Queen Elizabeth (1533-1603) the status of the chaplain becomes more stabilized. In standing orders of 1621, definite mention is made of regimental chaplains. It is written that a regiment "Hath of officers also whose charges belong equally to all companies and who are called Officers of the Staff: a preacher or chaplain.

In Austria the Military Ordinariate is organized, begin of the 17th century. A precious document is: "Constitutiones pro Cappellanis castrensibus a Vicario Generali Marenzi ex anno 1641"<sup>17</sup> about the duty and obligations of the chaplains. Two years later, Pope Urban VIII issued a breve where he the jurisdiction and faculties of the chaplains exactly stipulated. The emperor Ferdinand himself gave specific directives, f.i. in "Bestallung für Henrico Fastroyd, Bischof von Arben"<sup>18</sup> dated 22 August 1623. In there he determined the help given by the Government. Under Leopold I, the Jesuits took over.

It is understandable that in Catholic countries the history of the chaplaincy is thus oriented and vice versa.

In the Kingdom Naples, controversies existed between the local bishops and the Major Chaplains of the King, because the chaplains from Naples want to extend to themselves the



the exemptions given to the chaplains in Spain. The Holy See finally told the chaplains that they came under the jurisdiction of the local bishops and therefore all the sacraments administered without the bishop's permission would be invalid.

In Spain, during the wars of liberation against the Saracens, all Christians took up arms and not only the priests but also the prelates of the Church, went to war. In the war "de las Navas de Tolosa" The Archbishop of Toledo was with the King of Castile while the bishop of Barcelona stayed with the King of Aragon. Permanent, regular armies were organized only when Cardinal Cisneros founded "Las Milicias Plebeyas"; Charles V was the first to organize the Chaplaincy, "se destine al servicio espiritual de cada Compania un sacerdote secular".<sup>19</sup>

From the 17th century Spain, with his many territories and armies, finally stabilized the organisation of its chaplaincy by breve of 26 April 1645, from Pope Innocentius X to Philip IV.

In Germany the great Kurfürst (elector) instituted in 1652 a Protestant Chaplaincy for all soldiers according to the adage: "Cuius regio eius religio".<sup>20</sup> In 1659, one chaplain (feldprediger) became Supervisory Chaplain (Feldinspector) who directed the Chaplaincy following the directives of the Kurfürst and the General Staff. In military matters the chaplains were under the military commanders, in ecclesiastical matters under the Church (Lutheran) authority.

During the reign of Frederick William I of Prussia (1713-1740) the National Church was exempt and an autonomous "Military Church" was founded. In 1717 the Supervisory Chaplain became Provost Chaplain (Feldpropst), he had the care of all ecclesiastical matters in the army. This autonomous church was Lutheran.



The first Catholic chaplains were officially recognized in Germany in 1722 under Frederick William I. In 1779 a Catholic Provost Chaplain (Katholische Feldpropst) was appointed to direct all Catholic activities. Until the midst of the 19th century the Catholic chaplain was under the jurisdiction of the local bishop.

For Belgium and the Netherlands, it seems that the first statute for the Chaplaincy came into existence in the 18th century. We find that on 12 May 1733, Mary Theresa promulgated the "Ordonnances concernant l'organization de l'aumonie-rie a l'armee belgique".<sup>21</sup>

During the Brabant revolution and especially during the war of the peasants, many priests joined the armed forces and shared the hardships of the soldiers. It was the same during the Napoleonic wars when the young people were drafted to go and fight Napoleon's battles on all the battlefields of Europe. Everywhere they went their chaplains went. Finally under the Dutch occupation, the chaplaincy became an official institution (23 November 1818)

In Germany with the fall of Prussia in 1806, the autonomous Military Church came also to an end.

FINIS

## CONCLUSION

After reading this "completed" manuscript, I am more aware of its great shortcomings than before. But what I said in the Introduction still stands....

More should have been said about each period in history from which we extracted our facts or deduced our conclusions. It is indeed impossible fully to understand these facts (here in relation to the chaplaincy) without knowing the background against which they were projected. Is it not true that an object may seem of a different color, depending on its background and its light source? So it is with historical events and scenes.

Many more pages could have been written, had we not been limited by an arbitrary number of words "not to be surpassed". Again we also refer to the limitations as stated before.

We hope the reader will understand and look down with indulgence upon these pages. May this monograph be a contribution to the history of the chaplaincy at least in so far that it gives sources for the preparation of a more substantial work, to be done by a more competent and "unlimited" historian.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my advisor, Chaplain (Lt. Col.) R. Bell for his encouraging words, needed many times and very effective.

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